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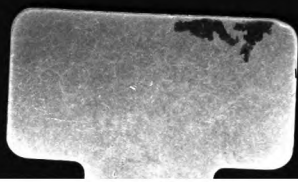
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A ROMANCE IN POETRY

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LIFE THROUGH THE LOTOS

A ROMANCE IN POETRY

BY

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LIFE THROUGH THE LOTOS.



I

THE old bard's eyes wandered in weary maze
From round the cavern to the ocean, spread
In boundless gloom beneath, save for the blaze
Of one weird isle of light ; then overhead
Roamed, as he longed the gathering clouds would shed
Their cooling stores upon the sultered air ;
Till thought by darkling ways was slumber-led
To Death's wild borderland ; shade-robèd there,
Viewing its yearnings vague and feverous sense of care.

Æ

B

II

Balder beside him, in a waking dream
Rapt through the past with many a silent tear,
Sat drooping, like a reed that feels the stream
Fast drying from its roots ; with grief and fear
Throeing to think he never more might hear,
At sunrise on the mount, the wonted lay
Of golden greetings, blent with deeper prayer,
Throb to the throbbing chords till every ray,
Splendid with colour and song, swooned into the
sapphire day.

III

But when beneath a vast funereal dome
The pallid vapours thronged, as evening fell,
In boding silence round their eagle home,
Muffling his movements, lest their noise dispel
The old man's sleep, with storm-tried manacle
The bossed folds of the door he barred, and hung
By triple chain, above an oaken tressel,
Sole lamp, whose beams a saint-like radiance flung
Upon his own long locks and one worn harp unstrung.

IV

Then down he sat again, with twilight gaze
Of love and sorrow lingering on the face
Whose smiles had thrilled him more than shouts of praise
Following his singing in the market-place.
Though the old bard, soothing in soft embrace
His choking sobs, had told him he should die,
How could he look one moment on that face
And think it but a mouldering vacancy
While life and hope were there, still breathing balmily ?

V

Forward he bent, for mutterings deep and low
Broke from the sleeper's lips of forms that fast
Were gathering, Titan-wingèd, 'mid the glow
Of dawn-light pale, in regions dim and vast.
Awhile there was a pause, and on the blast
Came wizard voices moanèd from afar. [passed,
Then he—of stream through gloom and gleam that
Aye leaping spell-drawn to a distant star,
Over the crags that verged a void of shapeless fear.

VI

So to his wondering ears dark oracles
Delivering, Sleep thrall'd at length his brain.
Forth from the jaws of sea and sky burst peals
Of thunderous laughter. Whirlwind, hail, and rain
Man's forest-trust are making feather-vain.
A space he tosses in fierce agony
Of hope and dread ; then, with his hard-earned gain,
Goes gasping down the blind immensity,
In soundless, lightless depths, with league-long shapes
to lie.

VII

Wild as the woe of one that wakes from trance
Of Gorgon terror, in the swathing hell
Of timeless tomb, seemed Balder's when, with glance
Wan-growing as the face whereon it fell,
He saw that he was left in that lone cell,
Bereft of all but his own anguished heart.
Air-grasping, as the floods around him swell,
At wind-moans, from the ground with breathless start
Oft lifts he, as he thought those pale lips yet might part.

VIII

White roses, with Lethean odours, gather
Now from the haunted gardens of the West,
O genii of the swoon, and gently scatter
Nepenthe from their folds, soothing with rest
Him sorrow-laden, in the gloomland blest,
Where murmurous streams, low breezes, shadowy choirs
With faint hymns lull the brain too deep distressed !
For grief hath wrapped his soul in her bleak fires,
And all the world beside in blackest fume expires.

IX

At morn the cavern doors he opened wide :
Welled from the sea a universal sigh,
As though there lay within its heaving tide
A multitude of spirits, whisperously
Their woes upbreathing to the ashen sky.
The chill airs shuddered on his fevered cheeks,
As conscious of that dire power's presence nigh,
Viewless to men, save in the deeds he wreaks
Of pallor, groans, and blood, sobbing and stifled shrieks.

X

Full fain he was to lay his burning head
Upon the old man's frozen breast, and there
Weep till the dream-like glories of the dead
Streamed through the rifting night of life's despair ;
But something in the still and phaseless stare,
Death-stated on those features stern, forbade
The breaking of his last strict charge to bear
To that far queen, whence royal birth he had,
Witness of robes wherein, when reft, his limbs were clad,

XI

So, ere the sun a blush of crimson gave
To many a floating victim of the gale,
Still in the dreams of love across the wave
Swan-speeded homewards by a cloud of sail,
Without, he fixed the isle-king's carved seal,
Asked, when he vowed no wish should be denied,
Whate'er it was the old bard would reveal,
Because his dirges soothed the prince whose bride
Upon her wedding day drooped lily-like and died.

XII

Then forth along the dusky ledge he wound,
Amid the giant crags, no longer now
With mysteries of eld heart-mantled round,
But burdening more the weight about his brow.
Discordant as the laughing sounds that flow
From withered senses seemed the memory
Of brighter moments, in the long ago,
Roused by the scenes he slowly wandered by,
As noontide billows, drear, to drought-dried seaman's
eye.

XIII

The scattered, quaint, and quiet sea-side town,
Ornate with old luxuriance of labour,
He saw beneath him, when the sun went down,
Breathed over coolly by the peaceful whisper
Of waves at rest ; and watched, 'neath woodland arbour,
Sere incense boughs from altar fires arise
More fair than in the stream their shadows were :
Then, from the temple roof, heard with dim eyes
A sorrowful sweet moaning go up to the still skies.

XIV

As haggard-thoughted as the winds that wail
From slow-flapped wings of a great ice-fiend, dreaming
Within some grim-ridged gorge, ere he set sail,
Through low-arched door he saw the sunbeams streaming
One morn about a child, as rosy seeming
As seraphs that, by twilight, laugh and wonder
At the rich halo all around them beaming.
It tried to grasp the golden rays, to ponder,
Perchance, in shady place, upon their bodies slender.

XV

Somehow that child brought back the balmy hours
When he would brood upon the sunny glory
Of singing leaves, and listen to the flowers
Whispering in forest shades a wondrous story
Of solemn shapes that float, wanded and hoary,
By moonlight underneath the gnarled branches,
To feed dew-breathing flocks upon the bloomy
Dust blown from sleeping blossoms ; or the dances
Of fays, whose flickering feet sparkle florescences.

XVI

Ah, then the waterfall's voiceful delight
At morning seemed a tale told thrillingly
Of jasperous splendours it had watched all night,
Revelling behind its waters radiantly!
And when the thunder filled the midnight sky,
Oh, how he loved to hear the old bard telling
Of eagles that had built their nests so high,
They saw the still stars from their rocky dwelling,
And fire and billowy darkness far down beneath them
swelling !

XVII

Then, like the snowdrops frozen long in icy
Trance, he broke into a mist of soothing
Sorrow beneath the warm beams of life's rosy
Dawning. Alone among the hills that evening,
Beside a forest-folded lake, low-lying,
Where dusk caves by their moaning made the stillness
Death-like and deep, he sang of one wan sitting
At the casement of a castle, built by stress
Of that same storm of sorcery that left her lover brideless.

XVIII

But when, far out upon the rolling deep,
He gazed upon a headland great and high,
At whose black base the spectral foam-clouds leap,
And sink, and rise, and rave despairingly,
While all along its verge the morning sky
Glows molten gold o'erflamed with furnace-red,
It seemed as though his soul sank drearily,
Alive, into the dwellings of the dead,
As those last peaks went down with days for ever fled.

XIX

When, for long space, monotonous and grand,
The limitless profound of sea and sky
Had lain around them, with no green-robed land
Embosomed on the waste waves wealthingly,
Now, past the noon of night, the heaven on high
Was mantled with dun shades ; and, grim and yellow,
The full-orbed moon glared with a faded glory
On billows swooning, sobbing far below,
In broken-voiced trance of stifling fear and woe.

XX

As one, thirst-fevered on a frail raft, gazes
Upon the dark head, diamond-eyed and dreadful,
Of a demon 'twixt him and a ship that passes
Close by, and heeds not hail or cry, for spell
Of that fell fiend, so gazed they on a vessel
That, as they slowly neared it, gurgled down
With blood-bedabbled decks, corpses, and spoil
Of merchandise, in strange confusion strown,
While a black hull, afar, sank on sight's misty bourne.

XXI

The cool, refreshing, quiet loveliness
Of coral isle, and surf-enclosed lagoon
That mirrored in its lake-like silentness
The moored canoe ; and, when the clouded moon
Her light withdrew, the league-enkindling swoon
Of breeze-lit phosphor to their land-lorn eyes
Seemed as celestial, soothing, sweet a boon
As angel-poured draughts of melting ice
To souls from penal fires just entering Paradise.

XXII

Then came they to a city, whose mountainous
Black buildings seemed the labour, long ago,
Of those archangels heaven rained down rebellious—
Works wrought with all their darkness and their woe.
The brazen images in its temples glow
With wrath and jealousy before black marble
Altars, whose gold and rubious chasings show
Wild shapes, wherein life would be terrible
Alike to eye and body of all things natural.

XXIII

Oft through the streets, at night, hosts hierarchal—
Their sable banners lusted with large jewels,
Their dark robes girt with silver—towards some temple
Would move with music, wild as the moan that wells
From burning pain, mingled with muttered spells,
Seraphic passion, and a wizard wailing.
Following, one night, whither the crowd impels,
He passed through glooms of a great forest, lying
Without the city gates, low in the night wind sighing.

XXIV

At length they entered on an avenue,
High-arched by giant oaks, that opened wide
Upon a large half-orb. The full moon threw
Light on a central temple, and the tide
Of a sobbing river, from whose farther side
Pale crowds, amid the forest shadows, gazed
Dumbly across the flood. Dark forms astride [raised—
Dark steeds, their black helms plumed blood-red, up-
Grouped with the grace of hell—red brands that roared
and blazed.

XXV

Stood 'twixt that sombrous temple and the stream
A scaffold, and a stanchion crowned with fire :
Thither a knight, as one that walks in dream
Bewildered by some monstrous shapes of fear,
Moved slow, with pallid lips and woeful stare,
Released awhile, upon the sward he knelt,
And sank into a deathlike swoon of prayer.
An old wound in the side, above his sword-belt,
Brake out in blood afresh, for pain of heart unfelt.

XXVI

But when he rose it seemed a weary age
Of unremitting anguish to behold
Two Herculean figures disengage,
With measured movements, every silken fold
Worn underneath his armour ; then ropes rolled
Round palpitating flesh and iron stake,
As though they both were feelingless and cold.
A space there was a pause, like spirits make
Towered on the rocks of doom 'twixt heaven and the
burning lake.

XXVII

With brazen roarings, and repeated pealings
Of thunder underneath the hollow ground,
Furious and threatening voices, pale lightnings,
And horrible groans that in air resound
Those fiend-engraven temple walls around,
Dying about the moon, its ponderous doors
Roll inwards, and disclose a dark profound,
Where Fear, encompassed round by formless terrors,
With direst dreaming shakes her wild-eyed worshippers.

XXVIII

While with one cry the multitude recoils,
Writhed from that gaping void a gory Python :
Blue, green, black, gold, and crimson were its coils,
Starred thick with livid jewels, plashed with poison :
Down all its ghastly length the slow convulsion
Of onward movement rolls with billowy sweep.
Each labyrinthine, lurid, long contortion [shriek
Is wreathed with sulphurous whispers and shrill
Of gloating rage and glee, menacing its victim weak.

XXIX

Titanic and delirious seemed the struggle
When, with a sudden leap, storm-strong, it flung
And bound, hissing its hate, those terrible
And tyrant-tightening folds about the wrung
Limbs of the helpless knight, until he hung
His head upon his breast, senseless or dead ;
Nor stirred while over him its fangs it swung,
Hell-triumphing beneath the cresset red :
Then, shrieking, on his heart fiercely it fixed and fed.

XXX

Hove into sight a black funereal barge :
Plutonian pæans, chanted clear and loud,
Welled wildly as it neared the river marge.
Crowned each with serpents, swathed in sable shroud,
Thence to the scaffold a mysterious crowd
Moved with a corpseless bier of ebony
And coiling silver, like the fringed cloud
Whose dragon wings pall over earth and sky ;
While from his prey the Python unwinds, and rolls back
slowly.

XXXI

When Balder saw the knight was surely dead,
Suspense, that with its fearful fascination
Had held him spell-bound, flagged fast ; and he fled
Alone into the forest, torn and shaken
By terror, pity, and exasperation,
So wildly that he reckt not having wandered
In bye paths, far out of the right direction.
On root-coils, serpentine, he sat and pondered,
As the damned dream on sin, by their own dreams soul-
sundered.

XXXII

The dissonant mutterings of the distant sea
He never heard, till nature sought to borrow
From sleep surcease of pain ; then soothingly
They moaned about him, yearning for the morrow,
And seeming, in his slumber, still to follow
Through forest shades the sound of far-off seas.
Pallid and ever-varying shapes of sorrow
Sighed, sweeping by him on the shifting breeze,
Beneath the foliage sere of sad autumnal trees.

XXXIII

He gazed upon an ocean wide, whose waves
Lifted their crowns of foam with sob and sigh
Above Elysian bowers ; crystal caves
That seemed in its abysmal deeps to lie,
Soft blushing with ethereal revelry.
But over them the drooping waves were driven
By a sky-scaling spectral destiny
Flooding with cold and ghastly light the heaven,
Till on the corpse-clad shore they sank, with anguish riven.

XXXIV

For food he plucked the wild wood fruit on waking,
And drank deep at a cool well where, in shrine
O'ergrown with trailing plants and mosses making
One with the trees its sculptures Satyrine,
Was throned stone semblance of that soul divine
Throughout the forest whispering solemnly
From deepest shadows, where no sunbeams shine,
Oracles to some haunting hierarchy,
With rustling garments there trooping invisibly.

XXXV

Then, guided by the sounding surges, slowly,
After the deeds and dreamings of the night,
Through God's own temple aisles, broad-pillared, high,
He wandered to an opening within sight
Of silent sea-birds standing soft and white
Above their shadows in the wet sand glassed ;
And waves that leapt, fresh, fountainous, and light,
About a rock, glee-glistening as they passed
In snowy falls of foam back to the ocean fast.

XXXVI

The wonder of the lustrous weeds, wave-woven,
In cavern pools ; and living creatures there,
Swift darting, with such delicate bodies clothed
They seemed too fabulously frail and fair
To hold a life gladsome as shapes of air
That dance round childhood dreaming ; and the spray
Of a streamlet, cast o'er cliff that seemed to tower
Close up against the sky, made him delay
Retracing straight his way to the city that bright day.

XXXVII

As mariners, in narrowing circles drawn
By song and vision round some Siren isle,
Now watch forms floating, fair as hues of morn,
Mid falling lights that with no wave defile
The glowing deep ; now on reef-rocks awhile
Black fiends are sitting, Stygian angels singing
Round hill-reared altars ; now clouds hide the isle,
Girding the feet of a great seraph swinging
The moon and stars, with his song a rapturous sym-
phony ringing ;

XXXVIII

So he, on starting with a caravan
Across the desert, that alone now lay
'Twixt him and that famed city colossean,
Whence, but an infant, he was rapt away,
Was whelmed in changing reveries of the way
They would receive him : now through dire disaster,
And now through regal vistas thought would stray,
Till Fancy, like some rich-robed incense-bearer
In a famine-stricken town, grew faint with her own
splendour.

XXXIX

Pillars of sand that darkened to the sky,
With ever-varying course and speed of movement,
Loomed one whole day within the reach of eye ;
As though the heaven-aspiring genii, pent
In realms of iron, with strength by madness lent,
Had struggled up to freedom through the deep ;
And, by their own fierce dreaming riven and rent,
Strove in the desert with distempered sleep,
In deadlier bondage doomed for aye their brains to keep.

XL

Next morn the sun looked forth, as God on high
Looks out upon the howling vast of hell,
With blood, with burning, and a herald army
Of whirlwind furies stormed with ceaseless struggle
Through all the monstrous midnight of their fell
And shapeless forms. When ardours of the noon
To shining leprosy the parched sands kindle,
Camel and man, toiled in enfurnaced swoon,
At timely warning bow beneath the fierce simoon.

XLI

The last well being behind them a journey
Of seven days, down to the dregs they drained
The too few draughts of its water that haply,
After that wind had blown over, remained.
Pressing with urgent speed, the next they gained
At nightfall, but, alas! to find it dry;
And when the morrow's sun pitilessly rained
Its burning beams like molten panoply
About each fainting soul, for life they still strive sorely.

XLII

Though scorched as sere as the sands enfolding
With heart-crushing vastness their weary way,
Their eyes, like the sun, burnt fiercely, beholding
The vanishing visions of rivers that stray
Where lime-laden boughs in mockery display
Their fiend-fruits, flying the thirst they frenzy.
One, wrought to madness, goaded without stay
His camel far beyond the reach of eye;
And, lying in the moonshine, that night they passed
both by.

XLIII

Forged in the fires of their delirious brains,
Fancies that glowed with an unearthly lustre,
Deepening with demon spite their fervid pains,
In fairest shapes proffered them fruit and water,
Which, when they strove to grasp, the white arms ever
Withdrew; and in their stead forms fierce and ghastly
Would lighten round them faster still and faster,
Until they fell—some with the shock to rally,
But others down that whirl sank to eternity.

XLIV

Ere long, amid the grim black mountains bounding
That burning vast of phantoms, thirst, and fever,
Dizzily on along a strait ledge lying
Where hanging precipices loom and lower
Above them, and a gulf by night and fear
Made bottomless gapes on the left, they go
Slope downwards to a lake, in its soft water
Revelling, while sobs from the full heart o'erflow
Till muffling mantles drown remembrance of their woe.

XLV

Balder, in his slumber softly o'ersailing,
Mist-like, moon-mazes of silence and wonder,
Hovering o'er wild gulfs, and hurried on wailing
Storm-winds of sorrow through dim worlds of horror,
Came to the cloud-halls majestic, that ever
Entemple the still soul of Eblis unseen.
Pillowed on purple, in trance of soft rapture,
Tresses dark and golden, drooped lids that screen
Gems too bright for mortal sight, there with soft breasts
were seen.

XLVI

Suddenly, silently every burning
Marvel of more than the world knows of beauty,
With the rapt lights round them to deep night turning ;
High up, a rail and balustrade slenderly
Fashioned of golden fire, with genii
Slowly ascending, beamed and died in darkness,
Voiced with a thousand fountains that suddenly
Ceased, in a solemn silence, their splashes ;
And one passed by with the dew on his hoar locks scattered like stars.

XLVII

He woke—and the morning about him breathed freshly.
So spent was their strength by the withering blast,
And the waterless, sleepless, sun-smitten journey
Following, that all that day in the vale they passed ;
And gazed on reed-isles in the cool lake glassed,
Faint sitting in shadow of tent or tree.
When a star-jewelled twilight o'erdomed the vast
Dark peaks of a hundred hills that round them lie,
By the fitful firelight Balder to his throbbing harp
sang richly :—

XLVIII

'Once an opal palace olden, girt by purple clouds
and golden,
Glowed upon a mountain, glowing with a thousand
cataracts, flowing
In voluptuous falls, enfolden by a gushing music,
moulden
In the balmy air, with throeing gusts of ravishment,
bliss-blowing
From blush-fruited forests, growing on that flowerful
isle, o'erflowing
With rolling sounds and rapt, that roam from the
full fountains of the foam.
Stars, a clearer splendour showing than our lower
lights, nor knowing
Change from night to day, o'erdomed ever there that
lustrous home
Of all honeyed dreams, that come to music-mantled
love, lulled, lonesome.

XLIX

'Ghast grow the blackening hours; phantoms fair
above the flowers
Float with sobs convulsively in a wind of agony;
Gathered dreadful in dark bowers, glorying groups
of demon powers
Gloat upon the fires that frenzy round that radiant
fane of Fairy;
Raving torrents wizardly mingle with the moaning
sea.
But the darkness on a sudden dies away, and all
the heaven
Throbs with song, triumphantly from each molten
galaxy
In a burning chorus breathe round about rapt
seraphs, wreathen
In far-fading circles, folden from the fane-fires to the
heaven.'

L

Through a paradise of the pomegranate, olive,
And vine, over vale and hill, where the turtle dove
To fragrant airs around it seemed to give
The soul and sorrow of forsaken love,
They journeyed on the morrow ; and at eve
Entered a gorge where images great and high,
With lion heads in dusk recesses, move
To wonder and strange awe the passer-by—
So fierce a spirit seemed in their large limbs to lie.

LI

A sudden turn disgorged them in a vaulted,
Vast place of rock, vestibular ; and there,
Steeped in rich depth of saffron light, they halted,
And gazed, as though with trance of speechless prayer
The Unseen touched them through the burning air,
Upon the sun, sunk golden, large, and low,
Above a city girt by vales more fair
Than gardens of the Titans when they glow [flow.
Around some sleeping goddess whose lips with love o'er-

LII

Broad walls and burnished gates of brass were zoned,
With battled towers, about that sumptuous city,
In whose wide ways the very gods sat throned
Beside canals high-arched with witchery
Of bridge-work, vast in size, but wild and airy
As giant cloud worlds where the genii dwell;
And pleasure barges, burning gorgeously
Upon the burning water, float with swell
Of many a graceful sail, and oars flashed like a jewel.

LIII

Far-flaming forests of fantastic spires,
Myriads of marvellous domes, whereon the glory
Of the blazing heavens lay like those living fires
That burn about the blest, radiant and stately
Palaces, gardens enriched with imagery,
Fountains and shrines, long avenues of temples,
Lakes, tombs, and colonnades, all rapturously
Burst on them, like the sphere-song where it mingles
About the throne of God with thunders, harps, and angels.

LIV

Through chambers swelling with rich strains, soft-
By many mingled instruments unseen, [breathèd
Balder, with casket and seal-ring, was led
Upon the morrow to that city's queen,
The mother from whose riven heart he had been
Rapt tracelessly before he knew her face; [screen
Then, where the sunbeams streamed through wealthing
Of dyed panes on a fount wrought with strange grace
Of figures, fruits, and flowers, waited some throbbing
space.

LV

Dreadful and dark upon his dreaming eyes
The throne-room opened overwhelmingly
With tumult of fear-filling melodies,
And armed men and armour glittering grimly.
Along an avenue of altars, palely
Flaming before stern-sitting images,
Up to a low gold, woven gateway went he,
Whence, far across the floor, he caught faint glimpses
Of old white-bearded men and a queen throned on a dais.

LVI

Kneeling he gave casket and ring to one
Who bore them towards the royal dais slowly ;
For words in those dread moments found he none.
He heard his heart big-beating falteringly :
The level space of floor before his eye
Reeled, vanished from him, and an unfelt night
Blinded to life's enfolding vision body
And brain awhile, until faint sense of light
Broke dawn-like, dim, and slow on his reviving sight.

LVII

A sharp sweet scent stole in upon his brain
With touch of fire ; opening wide wondering eyes,
In some soft-lighted room he found him lain.
Beside him, like the mystic imageries
By night beholden of the slumbering senses,
Stood rich-robed forms and fair. Confusedly
There came a rush of mingled memories ;
Then one, who called him son, bent graciously,
Crowned with a light like stars, whose kiss made all
show clearly.

LVIII

Some purple-wingèd weeks with luxury
O'erladen, in chambers builded to embay
Life in long lull of blissful reverie,
And fanes whose solemn grandeur day by day
With dreamful rites and gorgeous seemed to lay
The soul more open to their power o'erwhelming,
Went by ; and then, to watch in armed array
Of triumph all the hosts from war returning
With spoils and swart-skinned captives, he sat by the queen
one morning,

LIX

Beneath a canopy of cloth of gold,
Upon the palace terrace, where were gathered
State officers, whose garments manifold
Their several orders showed. Opposite, offered
To the gods of battle, sweet burnt savours smothered
In delicate dreams of fume the priests, the priestly
Standards, and fane façade all fervent figured
With the strifes of old ; a few frail clouds curled fairly
About the face-filled casements, festoons, and festal broidery.

LX

Martial music, mingled with a trampling like the
sea,
Sounded in the distance. With the roar of exulta-
tion
From every thick-thronged roof and vantage height
in the city
All the earth and sky, and the strength of them,
seemed shaken,
As though from the souls of men the blind-bound
veil of creation
Were about to be melting and molten in the glow
Of the glory of God, till it passed away like a
vision ;
And every heart out-thundered in fervid overflow,
As they felt the elements tremble, its triumph that
they go.

LXI

Then horsemen in dusk robes of red rolled by,
Tight reining in strong death-dark steeds, fire-eyed
With strength suppressed, and tossing terribly
The spears and raven plumes of them that ride.
Fair after them, flower-garlanded, soft glide
The merry mingling companies of dancing
Girls—each robed in white and blushing like a bride—
With kissing cymbals making sounds entrancing,
And sapphire-sparkling shoes their fairy feet enhancing.

LXII

Then came musicians clad in gorgeous colours,
Diverse as were their instruments, yet all
Richer of hue than day's departing fervours
Glowing in rapt agreement musical.
With charioteers arrayed in white and pearl,
Chariots, each harnessed to four steeds of white,
Came splendid, stately, multitudinal—
Chased silver, eyed with jewels large and bright,
Full-flashing all their lustre in a blaze of sunny light.

LXIII

Chained to the chariot of the old field-marshal,
With panther-like voluptuousness of feature,
Long glossy locks, and golden coronal,
The captive king came by ; 'neath bales of plunder
The footmen, following, bowed ; mid wagons, under
Piled weight of spoil from hostile fanes, heavily
Rolling past, marched priests robed in tiara
Wingèd and starred, a girdle curiously
Writhled like coiled cerastes, censer, and stoles stained
rosily.

LXIV

Then the king's harem, in houdahs reclining—
Rare beauties in marvels of ivory,
Gold, cedar, and silver with silken lining—
On elephants, followed by others heavily [by ;
Armed with bright burnished towers for bowmen, went
Women, and children that clung to their breast,
Or toiled by their side, worn, weeping, and weary,
With tresses dishevelled, in torn garb dressed,
Passed next, and after them men so bound that they
writhed without rest.

LXV

Bloodily stained, as with battle, the armour
Of Mars, amid that river of agony,
Outstretched gigantic on an iron car
Drawn by long train of straining steeds, rolled by
Then surge on surge followed the mighty army
That yet remained. The rear-guard with them bore
The captive king's pavilion triumphantly. [mother,
That night to the banquet-hall with his queen-
The largest in the palace, in royal state went Balder.

LXVI

Intercolumnar paintings, rich and rare,
Insphered by trails of slenderest tracery,
With shadowy phantoms and bright shapes of air
Gleamed like the sunset through a vaporous sky.
The spacious vaulting, sapphire-starred and high,
Cornice and wainscot, capital and frieze
Were mantled with a mazèd panoply
Of cedar, gold, and ivory phantasies, [seas.
Thick as the bowers, nymph-twined, in depth of twilight

LXVII

Uncurtained, triple-arched, the eastern door
Opened on statues in the moon's soft light ;
And elfin geysers, sparkling from the floor
Of flower-girt grottoes, gloom-enriched to sight
By dusky foliage, fruit, and blossoms white ;
Wild as the genii gardens, where the brain
Feasts, frenzied, on the fulness of delight ;
Till all the earthly, in ecstatic pain,
Faints from the flaming soul like leaden-linked chain.

LXVIII

Bathed in a flood of wizard glory, shed
From flames that gloat upon their own weird glow,
The tufted carpet, sinking to the tread
Of soundless feet ; samite, and festive show
Of fay and flagon wealthied to overflow
Breathed all the rainbow radiance, dream-like, deep,
Of visions that to witch-notes, soft and slow,
Glide under glittering domes, that they may keep
Some damsel, demon-loved, lulled in enchanted sleep.

LXIX

The seats were wrought to shapes, grotesque and bent,
With gargoyle faces, making grimmest dole ;
Some seemed like wolf and eagle wildly blent,
Some like the wizened dwarfs that rear and roll,
Hoarse laughing, in the foam, while wraith-bells toll
The doomed bark's knell. Incense and melody,
From unseen sources, atmosphered the whole ;
And long-haired slaves in light embroidery,
With garlands for the guests, were grouped voluptuously.

LXX

Up to the dais-table, through the maze
Elysian, wound boys, bearing to the swell
Of festive strains a tankard crowned with bays ;
But when the queen dissolved a lustrous jewel
In that libation bowl, by subtile spell,
The laughing pæan to a plaintive lay,
Sweet as the lingered pain of love's farewell, [ray
Was changed, as though they mourned the gentle
That in the murmuring wine was melting fast away.

LXXI

The blush of beauty deepened with the waning
Of the night ; and full and calm, for very bliss,
Welled a mingled murmur of voices, veiling
The music of the spheres. From pontifice,
And bowery isle, and every figured orifice
Of many a moresque dome, suddenly streamed
A blaze of light, and in a mazy morris
Through that enchanted garden trooped and teemed
Fair forms with star-blue beams, that astral spirits
seemed.

LXXII

Into the open moonlight with silvery
Laughter stepped, leaning a lovely burden
Upon each knightly arm, souls of revelry
And song ; they whose gentle eyes are laden
With the beauteous fires that kindle hidden
Worlds of light and glory in the dreaming
Heart of youth, till the shifting breezes, breathe
By the living zephyrs round them, burning
Seem with sapphire splendour, passionate with voiceful
yearning.

LXXIII

White crowds of water nymphs, rising breast-high
Above the foam-pale lake-plants, fair between
Dusk overdrooping reeds, from many a lonely
Mere, that lay embosomed by still shade and sheen ;
With green-robed dryads in nigh groves, half seen
About lit altars panting silently.
Soft clouds of incense to the blue serene,
Sang strains that seemed to linger, dream, and die,
As loth with love of earth, though longing for the sky.

LXXIV

But there was one as fair as he was dark—
The last lone lily of an ancient line—
To whose soft voice Balder would ofttimes hark,
Thrilling as though in caverns Sibylline
The sad, sweet murmurings of a voice divine
Foredoomed the deeds of Fate, when, with the queen,
She watched the one bright star of evening shine
Through deepening shades, by wild fowl winged,
dim seen,
Or the pure-plumèd swans slow sailing in its sheen.

LXXV

And now together from the rest they glide
Through labyrinthine rosy ways that wind
Where weep the dew-mists in the far-rolled tide
Of myriad-panted heart-throes, air-entwined
In one all-flooding sorrow ; the enshrined
Remembrance of some long-lost Aiden, welling
From deeps that undersea the mortal mind,
Swathed in by starry spaces round them dwelling—
Rich visions of a dream the sense of slumber quelling.

LXXVI

Embracing branches, overarchèd high,
In stately avenue above them bend :
The lights and shades around them tremulously,
With wave-like interminglings, beam and blend ;
In gentle ravishment together tend
And touch the clustering flower-cups, fairly
Illumined by the fire-flies that distend,
Gather, and weave into a galaxy,
By tangled movements telling rapt love-tales to the eye.

LXXVII

But when into a grove they wound, whose masses
Of fruit-filled foliage, mist-white with the moon,
O'er-canopied embalmèd glooms, soft grasses
That steeped the senses in a restful swoon,
The brooding doves, drowsed by the babbling tune
Of one low lapsing brooklet murmuring by ;
The bird of Paradise, with silver plume,
Perched where the branches whispered wooingly,
Throbbled in their dreams to hear love's thrilling tones
breathed nigh.

LXXVIII

Blushing and beauteous in the saintly splendour
That streamed about her through the rifted leaves,
She strove to still the fluttering heart that filled her
Too full of golden raptures. Richly heaves
Her ripening bosom, and the bliss she breathes
Makes mute the cherub whispers of the breeze,
That laughed a rosy laughter round the wreaths
Of trunk-entwining lustres ; so to please
Love's queen, who stole unseen through those entem-
pling trees.

LXXIX

Her silver-veiled eyes, down-drooped, and dim
With gathering tears, as star-shades in the spray,
She lifts not ; but with tremulous arms enfolds him,
Nestling, and stifling so the sweet affray
His words wrought in her : on his breast she lay
A glowing sacrifice, soft-altared there ;
Silent as is the crimson close of day,
Hushed by the ardours of the haunted air
When the rapt heart of earth breaks into voiceless
prayer.

LXXX

Ere long, like the corpse of a bride, broken-hearted,
Still robed in the mockery of blossom and veil,
That garden at dawn, when the guests had departed,
Sobbed over by mourners that seemed like the gale,
Soft, sorrowful, viewless, lay spectral and pale.
The frail wreaths of incense that linger as yet,
Like breath round cold lips when life's last pulsings fail,
From the shadow and silence that sink on the banquet
Falter forth to the wan air and fade in strange quiet.

LXXXI

But Balder, drowned in death-like slumbers, strayed
Through Atlantean woods that canopy
A horror-breathing atmosphere of shade,
Where every whisper seemed a blasphemy
Hell-hurled at heaven. Dire forms, with rites unholy,
Drinking from golden bowls deep gurgling draughts
Of blood, and roaring in unearthly revelry
Around sepulchral fires, he shuddered past
In dumb and dreadful trance, fear-stifled and aghast.

LXXXII

At length he reached a pool, Lethean, dead ;
On withèd roots he sat him, while the moon
Shone white amid the black clouds overhead :
Silence more dread than death in awful swoon
Held all the air ; and ever as the moon
Grew clouded came a ghoul with gorgon eyes,
Whose large head, riveting his gaze, eftsoon
Deepens in horror, till life's panged sense dies ;
Then to suspense awakes, struggles again, and flies.

LXXXIII

To lull the cold and deadly terror creeping
About the springs of life, he grasped his lyre.
Like sunshine through shade-haunted places sweeping,
Came soft across his soul the rapt desire
To quench in song the fears those realms inspire.
So, as he poured in raptured overflow
Strains wild and sweet, sparkling like diamond fire
That pool exhales fair forms with sudden glow,
Who, breathing sphere-like symphonies, around him float
and flow.

LXXXIV

The charmed forest flamed with isles of light,
Phosphoric, fluting, wild with elfish glee ;
And, panting through the fainting folds of night,
There came a glow of more than earthly beauty,
There came a gush of wondrous melody,
Filling the air with silver ravishment ;
And she, the lone star of life's stormèd sea,
Centred and souled that heavenly vision, sent [spent.
To soothe the long dark dream wherein he toiled sore

LXXXV

Awakening up, he felt the touch of fragrance
From lilies and from roses freshly strown
About the floor, fair with their tears' refulgence,
Ere sleep had softly from his eyelids flown ;
And mocked by hues from deep-dyed windows, thrown
Bloom-like on delicate-leavèd marble flowers,
So frail it seemed they surely were not stone,
But brought there by some sweet sylph from the bowers
Whose beauties never know the waste of wintry hours.

LXXXVI

Like visions in the dim voluptuous light
Hung the rich arras, ravishing life's belief :
A syren here sings to the waves by night,
That rave around a dragon-haunted reef ;
In this two lovers twine a rosy wreath
With buds, bright minutes bring them from the brake ;
And there a Cupid, on a lotos-leaf,
Lies laughing at the crowned fays in the lake,
That strive around the stalk him from his couch to shake.

LXXXVII

Another shows the sea-king on his way,
Followed by tritons blowing loud their conches,
Mermaids whose burnished tails burn in the spray,
And nereids floating free their sea-green tresses,
Beneath fantastic porches, domes, and arches
Opalled by sunset flooding all the sky,
To feast him in the ice-fiend's palaces
And watch his daughters dance full jollily
Upon the laughing foam. 'Ho! ho!' he seems to cry.

LXXXVIII

Weird water-witches, gnomes, and nameless things
That sing in the valleys their swooning ditties,
To make painless with bliss the death dawn brings
To poor drooping spectres its pale light pities,
Were wrought, enwreathed with flowers, fruits, and ivies,
Upon that wild and wondrous woof of Fairy.
Raptly fed Balder on its airy dainties,
For all is full of tender mystery,
Fragrance, and hues of heaven that meets a lover's eye.

LXXXIX

Softly stole life's mystic stream through the vales,
 where love and dream,
Like rich lights at sunset, lay weltering on its waves
 always ;
Rainbow-radiant hosts supreme on the hills around
 it teem,
Swelling many a liquid lay ; spells that make the
 large moon stay
Golden in dusk blue all day—from the zenith zoned
 not aye.
Thrilling visions of delight through that tranced
 heaven of night,
With a welling roundelay gorgeously upfloating,
 stray,
Gloating on the flowers droop-dight, dark and ame-
 thystine, bright
Only where the honeyed light embosoms blossoms dew-
 bedight.

XC

They two, one throbbing soul of love and beauty—
He dark and raven-locked, she roseal,
Ambrosial, blue-eyed, and glowed with glory
Of lengthy tresses, like the fires ethereal
And golden that burn round brows celestial—
Through woodland, wild, and lea-land oft would roam
Without the city, clasped by sounds æolian
Of branches, birds, bees, or some falling stream
Where bowed flag-lilies flushed with graspless dower the
foam.

XCI

On levin wings love-splendoured hours go by ;
Things fair and fleeting were their emblems ever ;
And Balder now, because the days drew nigh
That for initiation he should enter
Far lake-enfolded fanes, was forced to sever,
Full-hearted, some sad space from her he loved.
To lone ancestral towers his bride betook her ;
He, with the queen, to a mountain palace removed,
Where of old the princes waited what time the gods
approved.

XCII

Like a mountain among the mountains, that palace
Of pearl and gold seemed wild as the work of sorcery :
Seemed as if in a thunderstorm terrace [suddenly,
And dome might sink, drawn down by huge hands
That lifted it up in an age gone by ;
While a wailing from cavernous valleys around
Was mingled, perchance, with the mockery
Of demons low laughing down under the ground,
And the sobbing of sylphs of air, a soft soul-thrilling
sound.

XCIII

In raiment curious with coiling things, [made
Curved moons, and cryptic signs, with head-masks
Like all the winged, horned, finned, wild, tuskèd things,
Symbolical of the gods, a cavalcade
At twilight to the palace came, and played
For summons such weird strains as never other
Musicians with earth's instruments have made—
Strange chiming moans with closes quaint, that falter
Like foam showers from faint waves about the wide-
eyed listener.

XCIV

Down the groaning paths of the pine-chasms, on
through long
Dark gorges, up over the mountain steeps,
Down into the vales wound swift that wizard
throng,
With Balder in their midst, till a large lake
leaps
Into sight with the moon, and the mist that mutters
and sleeps,
Wind-blown into shapes of its dreams, as it drinks
The barge they steer slow o'er those dead lone
deeps.
Like a sheeted phantom that lessens and shrinks
At dawn from a death-doomed crew, to the isle out of
sight it sinks.

XCV

There long, in subterranean glooms, he laboured,
Fasted, and pondered on the great world's ways,
In many a mystic ceremony shadowed,
With songs of solemn thought, until a maze
Of countless spheres, that struggled towards the blaze
Of infinite rapt regions burning round,
Burst suddenly full on his tranced gaze,
Followed by deep sleep that all senses drowned
In the reposeful night of some death-dark profound.

XCVI

Waking, he seemed borne with the ebb and flow
Of some wide sea, where great forms in the gloom
Weltered and wandered dimly to and fro ;
Then, full awake, he found him in a room
By moonlight lit and silent as a tomb.
On jewelled salvers juicy fruits glowed, piled
Where the full moon might gloat on their rich bloom,
Whose beauties soon by feverish lips defiled, [wild.
Out on a terrace stepped he through archèd wreathings

XCVII

Over the dusk hills of that isle by heaven haunted ;
Over the deep-down vales and forests dark enfolding
Palaces of the Magi, where the lights enchanted
Seemed to flash and quiver, as of angels holding
Revels wild within ; over the torrents raving
Rapt oracles, that blended in a wizard murmur ;
Beneath the quiet stars, wistful stood he gazing,
High on the battled height of a mountain-crested tower,
Wound without by serpentine slow steps of strangest
sculpture.

XCVIII

And holy seemed the earth beneath, holy
The heaven above ; for he felt the might and mystery
Of the Spirit that is Love, breathing through the beauty
Of this vision-world of sense a peace to calm and satisfy
The troubled human soul : troubled for the melody
It ever hears afar ; troubled for the glory
Uprising like a star, beaconing through empty
Joys and sorrows spectral to the blissful regions that
beyond it lie, [it must die, must die.
Though it never reach them may, for amid the shadows

XCIX

To the tower, with music wondrous sweet and
low,
Came a crownèd company of priests in long pro-
cession ;
Cloud-like all about them foam-white vestments
flow ;
On their breasts the breastplates with a light
Elysian
Gleam and glow. Hand in hand with the Archon
He followed on behind to a temple by the
shore,
Whence came one with parting benediction.
Soft fell lit lamps upon the lustrous floor,
Seraphim and silver shrines far misted forms adore.

C

A swooning song of sorrow, like the wail
Heard above beleaguered cities in the calm of night,
From celestial forms upfloating fair and pale,
By the warriors stretched beneath, weary with the
lengthened fight,
As they sailed slow o'er the lake, till that island
sank from sight,
Still seemed echoing in their ears, though they knew
its notes no longer
Could be borne so far. Then the drops of liquid
light,
Bells of the water-nymphs, from the long suspended
oar,
Followed by a muffled plunge, broke alone the bound-
less silence till they reached the shore.

CI

Marshalled to meet their lord, a mounted legion,
Helmèd with ox-like horns of brass, there waited
Beneath the waning moon. As on a vision,
Rising with melodies all unabated
By length of listening, so his soul unsated
Gazed on the heaven of star-like beauty, glassed
Within its trancèd deeps ; and, still unsated,
Gazed, till he longed the long leagues overpast,
And love's delicious dream real on love's breast at last.

CII

But when, at dawn, with hasty steps he crossed
The threshold of his mountain home, there came
Across his heart a chill ; and, as he passed,
The attendants by perturbèd looks proclaim
The worst of all the woe they shun to name.
Up broad stairs wound he to a corridor,
Whose marble length the morn-eclipsèd flame
Of many lights made wan ; and there his mother
Met him with news, half lost in sobs she could not
smother.

CIII

The bondmaidens that ministered alway
In silk and scarlet, with gold girdles bound ;
Guards, statue-still, with silver shields all day ;
They that in woven raiment wrought rich sound
Upon the burning winds of sunset, round
Pavilions opening on the low large sun,
Heard, while suspense all other noises drowned,
Two voices making inarticulate moan, [borne.
And thought upon a bride by night from slain slaves

CIV

His mother's words, more hopeful than her eyes,
Assurances of search both wide and well
By armed men, light not the gloom that lies,
Populous with phantoms as the nether hell,
Despairingly about him. Fiercely fell
Those scorpions of darkness, suspicion -
And suspense, upon the heart that love's strong spell
Made easy prey ; and still there came no token
From the hosts of them that sought whither his bride
was taken.

CV

As on his couch that night full robed he lay,
Like a lithe snake from under a sleeper's pillow,
Flashing its fiery eyes unceasingly
Before him, rose the thought, that, long ago—
As he had learned from hints his bride would throw
Half-fearfully, then haste to things more genial—
One of great power, the people deemed to know
Forbidden arts, who dwelt lone in his castle
Apart from all his peers, made her rejected suital ;

CVI

And thereon uttered darkly worded threatenings,
Which now, O Heaven ! he had put into action.
What if against his battled walls he brings
Hosts that may break in with the noise of ocean,
And finds the dead corpse of his soul's devotion,
By dying vengeance made to mock his entry ?
No ; as a minstrel he will gain admission ;
And then at least beside her he may die,
If, when the crisis comes fate should all else deny.

CVII

Strict charging those awake and keeping ward
That, ere the morrow eve, a messenger
Would reach the queen from him, but with no word
Of his intent, save to the sole retainer
That he must take for guide, clad like a harper,
Full speed, till long past midnight, over wild
And whirling lands he rode. Then from his follower
Parted where many a dark ridge, cedar-mantled,
Ruggedly to the sky by Titans old seemed piled.

CVIII

Alone, on foot, amid the bats, the branches
Strange-eyed with stars, grim-gnarled trunks, still
Stiller airs the doleful owl entrances [shadows,
With sorcery of her wild-wailed sorrows,
Ghostlike and guilty in his gait he goes :
Then, overwhelmed with swoonful wonderment,
Stands gazing where the opening forest shows,
Beyond a lake, a cragged black-caved escarpment,
And towers o'er which the moon seems held by strong
 enchantment.

CIX

By intricate wild ways he had to wander,
Difficult in spite of all foretold direction,
Mid chasms overhung by bush and creeper,
To a remote outlying barbican,
Reached by strait stairs that wound up to the low iron
Doorway of a sombrous, solemn, sinuous, cedarn
Alley, from gloom disgorging him sudden,
Where grew ten thousand roses, each white urn
In the enamoured moonlight seeming to breathe and
burn.

CX

Flag-flowers, reeds and rushes to the right
Were girdled round a great lake, in whose centre
Slept some stone monster with black scales bedight.
Rocks, wrought with forms grotesque, towered on the
further
Bank, where was a cavern hung with carved bats, larger
Than life ; and two weird women leaning tall
And stately in dusk silence upon either
Side a dragon with wide mouth, chimerical, [fall.
Whence the white water flashing foamed in a threefold

CXI

Through arbours where the gourd and vine were laced
With poisonous clusters, beautiful but deadly,
Slope into flowerful vales pine-growths embraced ;
Through cavernous arcades of rock, solemnly
Guarded by griffon, ghoul, and genii,
Fire-forgèd out of bronze, where crystal figures
Kindled their cells with light, on hasting fearfully,
He reached a domèd tomb, with weeping sculptures
Gleaming through a cypress grove, whose gloom no
whisper stirs.

CXII

Like cool rain unto parchèd lips came softly,
Amid the fevering strife of hope and fear,
The thought how sweet within that tomb to lie,
Linked with his lost love, where life's dread dreams
never
Might break their silent sleep. As by sorcerer
Raised upstarts some spirit of old, suddenly
Stepped forth a slave, whose turban caught the glitter
Of the moon upon its gems, unusually
Large of limb and swarthy as the black familiars be.

CXIII

Startled by the abruptness of his coming,
At first he found no words ; but straight that other
His bardic garb beholding, and harp hanging
Behind his back, of lodgment made him offer,
Saying that some short time ago his master
Had lost, by death, the old castellan minstrel,
And so had bade them seek out for another ;
And would he, since it opportunely fell
That he should wander there, there alway with them
dwell?

CXIV

Upon the morrow with the wild retainers,
Rioting and revelling well-nigh all day long,
He sat, and throbbed to hear low laughing whispers
That told him all he sought ; and many a song,
Whose passion hushed and held that stormy throng—
As ocean, ere the typhoon walks abroad,
When but one ~~voice~~ ^{voice} is heard its waves among—
Welled from him, thrilling-toned, till strange light
flowed
From heart-pain o'er his face, as palace halls flame-glowed.

CXV

Their lord sent not for him till day was spent ;
And then one led him to a spacious chamber,
Lighted by fires that writhed about a serpent
Coiled on a black stone altar in the centre.
Through the fitful strange glimmering and sombre,
From arched and silvern recesses, the mingled
Wild wailing of water was heard, like the ever
Unheeded endeavour of spirits, sob-stifled
With pain, to move pity in fiend-hearts, hate-mantled.

CXVI

Vases of jasper, agate, and porphyry ;
High windows woven with rare gems and gold ;
Gates at the further end black-barred with ebony,
Centred by black shields with silver skulls scrolled,
Shut on an alcove, where heavy stands hold
Twelve lights round a tomb palled over with crimson
And black brocade embroidered with pearl and gold,
Were about the dread presence, that made them a vision
Of deep-meaning emblems, dire mysteries of passion.

CXVII

On a low-down divan, slowly inhaling
The fragrance and fume of the lotos, he lay ;
Powerful and pale through the curled clouds, veiling
Partly their form, seemed his features : like spray
Hurled from hoarse waves, whose mutterings betray
Wild echoes of demon worlds down in the deep,
His accents, though broken, thick-throated, bewray,
Cast forth with close pauses, rich horrors that steep
In continual revel the brain, while the soul wakes and
watches its sleep.

CXVIII

Midway, in front of two cloaked figures, carven,
Before the wreathèd rail-work, Balder placed him.
One pillowed on her lap a Venus, shapen
Full length, with dream-like loveliness of limb,
The death upon her face could scarce bedim ;
The sister sorrow drooped above a shroud,
Hinting the frame of one whose requiem
Hath long been moanèd by a buried crowd :
Void eyes and fleshless bones for ribs the sunk folds
showed.

CXIX

He sang of high-thronèd Death, with nethermost
 night for a girth ;
And the myriads beneath the beat of wings, whose
 insufferable heat
Burnt fierce, with a blood-bringing breath, on the
 slaves of that Archfear Death,
Gazing into the mists replete with shapes unspeakable
 round his feet,
While mocking thunders repeat the respite their
 groans entreat ;
Then of a cavern there of old, glowed with the glow
 of molten gold,
Yearning, ardent-voiced, to greet those that from the
 tyrant's seat
Seek for sanctuary, bold coming over corpses cold
In their search for other fold than the phantoms or
 the mould.

CXX

Straight at his master's word an old retainer,
Priest of the Stygian Serpent, showing only
Lank hands and glittering eyes from out the sombre
Raiment that swathed him otherwise entirely,
Down wide gloom-haunted corridor and gallery
Slow led him to a room, where lamps unseen
Through silken hangings shed a soft gold glory,
And gloated with a shadowy Tyrian sheen [seen.
About the delicate paintings that on the walls were

CXXI

And well he knew behind that lustrous screen
The rich reft soul of tenderness and beauty,
For whose sweet sake he dared that dark demesne,
From strains of his wile-woofed minstrelsy
Unwound the hidden plot. A white arm softly
Parted their folds : and he beheld her there,
With face half shadowed by a canopy
Of gorgeous plumage ; still, in grief and fear,
Among her many maidens the queenliest and most fair.

CXXII

That night, from the giddy height of a turret window,
Far over lake-engirdling rocks that lay
Trance-writhen in cold glaring moonshine low
Down within the vale, he gazed, till two steeds stray
From distant cedars on a guideless way—
The given signal he agreed to look for,
If chance should favour—then, in strange affray,
Dumb-footed stole through dusky halls, and saw
Ouph-corbels, chin on knee, with crooked mouths mock
his terror.

CXXIII

At every turning by the pains of fear
Nigh overwhelmed, lest some one unaware
Leap on him in the dark, he gains the door
Where flutter-hearted love awaits his whisper
Mid her frayed maids, and gives him entrance there.
Turbulently tossed the loud alarum bell:
The din of arms, the rush of feet, the anger
Of many voices, lion-like and fell, [swell.
Break out in sudden tumult, roar out, and sink, and

CXXIV

Against the barred door with a bare stiletto
He stood, while all that temple of black
terror.

Trembled, as though the hosts of hell below
With fire, and with derision, and with thunder,
Roared surging up towards its base through
nether

Abysms of night. The conflict raged so
fiercely,

So long; feet passing seemed to come so
near,

His bride drooped pale and muttered moan-
ingly,

Then in the mists of trance forgot her agony.

CXXV

Like the noise of triumph heard about a flame
In whose folds a great archangel, after victory
Over a savage hundred-handed storm of strength
without a name
Or shape to hold in eye, through darkness to the sky
Burns with shouting gloriously, from the beleaguer-
ing hosts a cry
Rolled against the splendid stars with a warlike
exultation,
With a trumpet-tone of vengeance, with the song-
like majesty
Of warriors roused to wrath ; a mailed ocean
Roaring to avenge a wrong, whitening every wave
with passion.

CXXVI

Well knowing that they now had made an entry,
And grappled in the gap, with tenfold fervour
He grasped his knife and listened breathlessly.
Sudden a battle-axe crashed on the door:
In leaped upon him with delirious laughter
The lord of that fast ruining domain.
Smitten with sharp pain on the head fell Balder,
Seeing his rescuers for him in vain
Pour down the envious length of the reeling hall amain.

CXXVII

With heart so full of solitude and terror
Thought floated on its own sea, lone and helpless;
He seemed upon a boundless waste to wander,
With never hope of goal to break its vastness:
A land of desolation, death, and darkness,
Domed overhead, inisled about with silence,
Infinity, and fear, where lay, by stress
Of any wind unstirred, at intervals immense,
Abysmal lakes of blood, that strangely shook the sense.

CXXVIII

So cursed with life amid the monstrous gloom
Of regions where hoarse cries from harpies' caves,
Shrieks from unquiet spirits in the tomb,
Or hell-hags howling on tempestuous waves
Had come like angel-songs where torment raves
In vain, slow moved he, as the soul in sleep
Moves through the sad presaging mist that saves
From wandering slumber's eyes that nameless deep
Which they who once behold wake never more to weep.

CXXIX

A glimmering light rose on the far horizon :
Still forward led by some dim-drawing power,
On went he to a wild and wondrous region,
Where blazed beneath his feet each flame-like flower.
Lightless the sky ; but from them as from rare
And radiant jewels, shaped by sorcery, streams
A blended brilliance up the breezeless air—
Not like the glow from those in earthly climes,
But burning brighter far, lividly tinged at times.

CXXX

As he advanced they hid the ground from sight :
Their fragrance breathed a rapt intoxication,
Their leaves an overwhelming blinding light ;
But, mingled with their blissful fascination,
A haste of underflowing perturbation
Seemed ever whispering fears of sudden change,
Suspense of some dire-coming consummation !
Perchance the flowers beneath his feet that cringe
Might rise like fire-filled fangs fierce-frenzied for revenge.

CXXXI

Bedimming, banishing the world without,
A myriad-domèd black sepulchral city,
Through whose wide gates moved ever in and out
Dark mourners with death's muffled pageantry
While deep funereal bells tolled solemnly
And slow, rose, as no earth-born vision may,
With growing grandeur, still gigantically
Growing, growing on the sense that longed to stay
Its gorgon-glooming power, as hell the High God's sway.

CXXXII

O'erwhelming life with Titan agony,
The throbbing, sobbing, long Plutonian tolling,
Rolled from those temples vaster than the eye
Of flesh might comprehend, became the roaring
Of a shoreless ocean, rising and falling
Around two mammoth monsters, leisurely
From far approaching with low bellowing,
And large as ice-fields on the Arctic sea,
Mile after mile at dawn solemnly floating by.

CXXXIII

As Chaos in the waste of storm and night
Gashed his own limbs, and struggled with the chains
About him wound, when first the Lord of Light
Burst on his realms with fire and dizzy pains,
So, burying brazen nails in gory stains,
Each savagely at the other rends and raves.
Red rushed the riven fountain of their veins,
While, lion-like, the bloody-mouthed waves
Rage roaring up to drink deep the hot life it caves.

CXXXIV

Thus those two gory mountains, with more fury
And tyrannous torrent strength than maddened ever
The black repose of Hades with an army
Of reeking ghosts, for many a deadly hour
Battled, until the universal air
Burnt round them with a lurid blaze of wrath ;
And, roaring from the sky, a gorgon shower
Of demons ruined down upon the breath [death.
Of sulphurous whirlwinds swept the whole to sudden

CXXXV

The sky and sea passed with that storm from sight,
Revealing, as they sank, the living glow
Of glories ravishing with their lips of light
The sun-surpassing world in which they flow
With intermingling motions, making so
A visible maze of moving melody,
Wherein each angel, winding swift or slow,
With diverse radiance burns upon the eye,
Like the embodied note she sings so rapturously.

CXXXVI

The deepening splendour of that countless choir,
The gathering stress of that one-voicèd strain,
Increasing with the still increasing fire
Of their own forms, panged with increasing pain
His bliss-o'erburdened, struggling, trancèd brain,
Until the whole swift swallowed in a throe
Of furnace-heat, lightening through every vein,
He found himself where flowers have ceased to blow,
Across a black bare waste still wandering onward slow.

CXXXVII

After bewilderings long through barren gloom,
And one wild vale where heaven and hell seemed blent
In wildest orgies, through the grim shades loom
Legions whose iron-wavèd pinions sent
A horror of soul-crushing sound, violent
And deafening round him. Far in front the glare
Of red volcanic regions, riven and rent
By molten seas ever upthundering there,
Glowed threateningly and fierce through the phantom-
thronging air.

CXXXVIII

By many a fiery cataract down-hurling
From steeps, about whose high verge ceaselessly
Black clouds upon conflicting blasts were whirling;
By gorges where great torrents moltenly
Meet in a maelstrom with a maddening outcry;
Over earth-crusts that howled and shook; through a
Of smoke-billows blindingly rolling by, [tempest
Hot ashes and boulders hurled up from the crest
Of mountains against the sky, on frantic and fevered
he pressed.

CXXXIX

Then laboured through lands long embered and dead
To the slope of a mountain whose marge stopped
On an infinite chaos of night outspread [abruptly
At the feet of a tempest eternally.
Silence and blinding light alternately
Were followed by thick darkness and the roaring
Of more than thunder, earthquakes, or the sea.
Stunned, deafened, dazed, with clasped hands raised,
imploring [with redoubled roaring.
Heaven, hell for respite, stood he; but the storm raged

CXL

And in one deadly pause a livid blaze,
Waxing and waning rapidly, but still
Unquenched, smote swift with far-outforking rays
A crag that crashed from steep to steep until
It sank without a sound, save the whizzed thrill
Of winds aghast, down into the waste of night.
For fear, he would have climbed more high the hill ;
But a landslip thwarted his utmost might,
And the laughter of demons roared around as he rushed
into bottomless night.

CXLI

The fever visions, vanishing in that fall,
Left neither sense of life nor any motion.
The queen his mother, the attendants, all,
Save only her whom from fell hands he won,
Looked through their tears and deemed that he was
But soon again he rose from out the tomb [gone.
Of utter blankness to faint recognition
Of dusk forms in a dimly lighted room,
And their low sobbings heard soft breaking through
the gloom.

CXLII

The death-dews gather on his pallid brow,
The death-mists o'er his eyes, but through them
Gently a glimmering from the long ago : [gleams
A rosy-dimpled child before him seems
With little fingers grasping at the sunbeams
That sparkle all about its flowery path.
So for awhile with fading brain he dreams.
Ebbd slowly then the weary wave of breath ;
Life lulled itself to sleep, and sleep slept into death.

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